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Seniors rank UM high for educational experience

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The University of
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NEWS RELEASE

Nov. 27, 2002

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SENIORS RANK UM HIGH FOR EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

MISSOULA –

A strong majority of University of Montana-Missoula seniors said they had a good or excellent educational experience at UM and would attend UM if they could start over again, according to results of the 2002 National Survey of Student Engagement.

The survey also found that 66 percent of freshmen and 72 percent of seniors participate in community service or volunteer work, while more than 40 percent of students participate in co-curricular activities such as organizations and student government.

The NSSE ("nessie") determines the level of student engagement – a strong predictor of how well students learn – among freshmen and seniors. Of 700 UM freshmen and seniors given the NSSE, 270 completed the survey for a response rate of 40 percent. Thirty-four percent of the respondents were male and 67 percent were female; 43 percent were freshmen and 57 percent were seniors.

Student engagement represents the effort students devote to educationally productive activities and how well colleges engage students in these activities. The survey measures five benchmarks: level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching educational experiences and a supportive campus environment. Results of

the survey are used to improve the quality of undergraduate experience.

The NSSE is conducted by the Indiana University Center for Postsecondary Research and planning. It is co-sponsored by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and the Pew Forum on Undergraduate Learning.

Promising findings at UM include:

- Eighty-four percent of seniors said UM provides a good or excellent educational experience, and 80 percent would attend UM if they could start over again.
- Thirty-one percent of UM seniors have participated in a learning community – a small group-learning experience such as a Freshman Seminar, a research team or a study abroad program – compared with 22 percent at nationwide peer institutions.
- Fifty-five percent of seniors prepared two or more drafts of an assignment before turning it in vs. 46 percent of peers.
- Fifty-six percent of freshmen and 52 percent of seniors report having serious conversations with students who have different values, beliefs or opinions.

Disappointing findings include:

- Only 14 percent of freshman and 21 percent of seniors say UM emphasizes spending significant amounts of time on studying and academic work.
- Forty-one percent rate the quality of their academic advising as poor or fair.
- Thirty-six percent of freshmen have never talked about career plans with a faculty member or adviser, compared with 24 percent at peer institutions.

The study ranks UM student engagement as average among its peer institutions, while

indicating improvements are needed in several areas, particularly for freshmen: enhancing academic and intellectual experiences, increasing the number of reading and writing assignments and improving advising efforts.

Lois Muir, UM provost and vice president for academic affairs, said data garnered from this survey will be put to good use.

“The feedback received from the NSSE is very helpful in determining areas for improvement,” Muir said. “We are discussing our NSSE results and will determine necessary changes based upon the feedback we have received.”

For more information on the NSSE, visit the Web site at www.iub.edu/~nsse.

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